

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A RELIGIOUS LEAP
IN KIERKEGAARD'S *A LITERARY REVIEW*

A Thesis

by

ERIK SVEN BERQUIST

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2008

Major Subject: Philosophy

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Daniel Conway
Committee Members,	David Erlandson
	Theodore George
Head of Department,	Daniel Conway

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ABSTRACT

Toward an Understanding of the Possibility of a Religious Leap in Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review*.

(August 2008)

Erik Sven Berquist, B.A., Minnesota State University, Mankato

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Daniel Conway

In his work *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard bemoans much about “the present age,” and in the text he presents an extremely bleak picture of the potential for one to live an authentically religious life. However, he also makes it clear that he believes the present age is in a uniquely superior position because a religious leap remains possible. The purpose of this thesis is to determine why Kierkegaard believes that a religious leap is possible in the present age. I attempt to understand one promising method of achieving a religious leap by appealing to another work by Kierkegaard entitled *Philosophical Fragments*. It is my position that, given a particular interpretation, *Philosophical Fragments* places some readers in a position where a religious leap emerges as a possibility.

To Betsy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: VEXING CONCERNS IN THE *REVIEW*

In his work *A Literary Review*¹ Kierkegaard bemoans much about “the present age,” and in the text he presents an extremely bleak picture of the potential for one to live an authentically religious life. However, he also makes it clear that he believes the present age is in a uniquely superior position because a religious leap remains possible. The purpose of this thesis is to determine why Kierkegaard believes that a religious leap is possible in the present age. I will attempt to understand one promising method of achieving a religious leap by appealing to another work by Kierkegaard entitled *Philosophical Fragments*.² It is my position that, given a particular interpretation, *Philosophical Fragments* places some readers in a position where a religious leap emerges as a possibility. Chapter II and III are devoted to clarifying and advancing a particular reading of *Philosophical Fragments*. Once I have established a reading of *Philosophical Fragments* I will consider how this reading might help account for some of the confusing comments made in *A Literary Review*.

The purpose of Chapter II is to begin a discussion about the purpose of *Philosophical Fragments*. In it, I consider one attempt to make sense of *Philosophical*

This thesis follows the style and format of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, trans. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.)

² Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, trans. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

Fragments by Stephen Evans. Despite many comments that suggest that Kierkegaard resists apologetic arguments, Evans argues that some “non-foundationalist” apologetic arguments can be found in *Philosophical Fragments*. I present a number of reasons for thinking that Evans’s account only reveals part of the story of *Philosophical Fragments*. More specifically, I show that his approach is mistaken because he does not take seriously remarks that Climacus writes elsewhere regarding his general strategy as an author and the ironic character of the text. Though I believe his approach is ultimately incomplete, Evans offers an important stepping-stone to the complete reading that I will present in Chapter III.

The previous chapter considers the validity of Steven Evans’s reading of *Philosophical Fragments* as a work of apologetics. Chapter IV considers a view that attempts to accommodate these observations and show that such a reading is consistent with a sort of apologetic reading of *Philosophical Fragments*. However, the apologetic arguments are ultimately self-undermining, and they are only part of the broader project of *Philosophical Fragments*. Once I demonstrate that one can understand the text in this manner, it will become clear that the text can provide important insights into the way in which Kierkegaard desires to frame religious questions. In the third chapter, I will demonstrate how this insight provides a potential tool for understanding claims made regarding the possibility of a religious leap in *A Literary Review*.

In Chapter IV, I turn my attention to considering Kierkegaard’s work *A Literary Review*. I reflect on some potential problems in this work as outlined in an essay by Daniel W. Conway entitled “Modest Expectations: Kierkegaard’s Reflections on the

Present Age.”³ Conway claims that Kierkegaard advances disparate claims about the role of reflexion and the possibility of religious authenticity. I consider whether Mulhall’s reading of *Philosophical Fragments* offers any promising insight into how one might be able to make sense of the troubling claims Conway locates in *A Literary Review*. I will demonstrate that *Philosophical Fragments* presents a possible solution to the problems in *A Literary Review*. Though it initially appears that Kierkegaard’s conception of reflexion makes an authentic religious life impossible, there are reasons for being somewhat optimistic regarding ability of some to achieve a genuine religious existence in the present age. If I am successful, and I believe that I am, then I will have revealed an important connection between *A Literary Review* and *Philosophical Fragments*, namely, that *Philosophical Fragments* is a means by which someone can break free from the problems of the present age.

³ Conway, Daniel W. “Modest Expectations: Kierkegaard’s Reflections on the Present Age” in *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook 1999*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, (de Gruyter: New York, 1999.)

CHAPTER II

WAS KIERKEGAARD'S JOHANNES CLIMACUS A CHRISTIAN APOLOGIST?

The purpose of this chapter is to outline preliminary concerns regarding Johannes Climacus' purpose in *Philosophical Fragments*.⁴ In particular, I will examine one attempt to make sense of *Philosophical Fragments* by Stephen Evans. Though I believe his approach is ultimately incomplete, Evans offers insights that allow us to understand significant stylistic elements in *Philosophical Fragments*, namely, that one can read it as a work of nonfoundationalist apologetics. The second chapter will solve the problems that are associated with Evans's reading, and we will gain a clear picture of *Philosophical Fragments* as work in which Kierkegaard endeavors to put the reader in a position to live an authentically religious life. In the final chapter, I will demonstrate how this work presents itself as a potential means of solving problems in *A Literary Review*.

Stephen Evans has argued that one can read *Philosophical Fragments* as a work that contains arguments that "seem aimed at showing that something like Christianity is true."⁵ According to Evans, it is easy to recognize that *Philosophical Fragments* is a work that appears aimed at attacking apologetic arguments, so he takes himself to be advancing a controversial thesis. Evans argues that interpreting the text as anti-

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments/Johannes Climacus*, trans. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong, (Princeton:Princeton UP, 1987.)

⁵ Evans, C. Stephen, "Apologetic Arguments in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1994.)

apologetic is too limited: it only considers one kind of apologetics, namely, the “foundationalist” sort. Evans admits that Climacus rejects foundationalist apologetics however, contends that Climacus can be read as endorsing another kind of apologetics, which the obvious view overlooks: “non-foundationalist” apologetics. Thus, Evans concludes, the apparent conflict between Climacus’ rejection of apologetic arguments and his overall philosophical project is the result of failing to distinguish between two divergent notions of apologetics. When Climacus’ apologetics are properly understood, however, no conflict arises. Contrary, then, to the traditional view, Climacus makes room for apologetic arguments to play an important role in believers’ lives.

I will argue that Evans is correct in pointing out that there are apologetic arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*, but he fails to offer an adequate account of the rhetorical function of these arguments. This chapter will result in a question that I devote the next chapter to addressing, namely, if we cannot understand the purpose of these apologetic arguments in *Philosophical Fragments* in the way that Evans does, then how are we to understand the function of these arguments?

This chapter proceeds by summarizing Evans’s argument. I then offer my objections to Evans’s position. I do so in two steps, first, by appealing to Climacus’ self-described project as an author, and, then, by appealing to the remarks Climacus makes about a review of *Philosophical Fragments*.

An Outline of Evans’s Essay

By pointing to various sections of the text that appear to advance apologetic arguments and reviewing the text as a whole, Evans concludes that *Philosophical*

Fragments is a book that can be read as if it were intended to make Christian views more plausible.⁶ Though it seems that Climacus is often trying to make Christianity appear less reasonable, Evans argues, we can understand him as presenting a sustained case for the truth of Christianity.

At the close of the first chapter entitled “Though-Project” Climacus engages in dialogue with an unidentified interlocutor. This chapter is devoted to demonstrating an alternative to the Socratic method of achieving truth, and the alternative Climacus offers implies something that is suspiciously similar to the Christian claim of humanity’s sin condition. Climacus refers to our inability to achieve knowledge of the truth on our own as “sin.”⁷ The way out of our sinful state is not through Socratic recollection; rather, we can only have knowledge of the truth by divine intervention. The notion that humanity is in a state of ignorance, which Climacus likens to sin, coupled with the position that we can only escape this ignorance with the aid of the divine, is too similar to the Christian story for Climacus’ audience to ignore. This suspicious similarity results in a confrontation between Climacus and an interlocutor. The resemblance to the Christian story spurs the interlocutor to accuse Climacus of plagiarism. Commenting on this similarity, the interlocutor says of Climacus, “you are behaving like a vagabond who charges a fee for showing an area that everyone can see.”⁸ The implication of this passage being, everyone is already aware of and has access to the story that Climacus is

⁶ Evans, 72.

⁷ Kierkegaard, 15.

⁸ Ibid, 21.

telling. Since it is obvious that Climacus could not be the author, Climacus must be committing an act of blatant plagiarism. Climacus acknowledges that he is not truly the author, and he goes further and claims that no human could, in good conscience, admit to being the author of this story. The fact that no author can honestly claim this as his or her own story, Climacus asserts, is what makes this story so fascinating, and this is what motivates Evans's apologetic analysis.

Evans calls this argument the "'No Human Author' Argument,"⁹ and, he asserts, it corresponds to a much older, and commonly used apologetic argument. Evans outlines the argument in the following manner:

1. A religious claim of type X could not have been invented by any human being, but only by God.
2. Christianity makes a claim of type X.
3. This religious claim of Christianity could only have been invented by God.¹⁰

The X in Climacus' rendition of the argument, according to Evans, is the claim that humanity is inescapably caught in error and will remain caught in this error until she is pedagogically related to god. It is only through divine intervention that one can avoid being in error. This notion is not, according to Climacus, something that any human could take responsibility for, and so it must be from another source, namely, God. Since

⁹ Evans, 65.

¹⁰ Ibid, 66.

Christianity makes this claim, Christianity makes claims that could only originate from a divine source. Thus, Christianity appears to have a genuine sanction from the divine.

The second argument, like the first, occurs at the close of a chapter, this time entitled “The God as Teacher and Savior.” Once again, this argument comes up during a discussion with the interlocutor. In the second chapter, Climacus outlines a narrative of an incarnation and the incarnate god’s redemptive task as the only means of escaping the error that is outlined in the first chapter. The story sounds more than suspiciously similar to the biblical story of Christ as God incarnate, and the interlocutor’s charge is once again plagiarism. The interlocutor strikes a dramatic chord, claiming, “What you are composing is the shabbiest plagiarism ever to appear, since it is nothing more or less than what any child knows...”¹¹ Climacus responds by first admitting that he is, indeed, not the poet responsible for the poem, but then he wonders who the poet might be:

But who then is the poet?...If there is no poet when there nevertheless is a poem—this would be curious, indeed, as curious as hearing flute playing although there is no flute player...perhaps it is not a poem at all, or in any case is not ascribable to any human being or to the human race, either.¹²

It would appear that Climacus and his interlocutor must consider the possibility that not only is this story not Climacus’, but they also cannot attribute it to any single individual, and therefore it must come from a non-human source; i.e. the divine.

Evans calls this argument “*The Argument from the Uniqueness of the Incarnation.*” In the respect that this argument depends on a particular Christian story that cannot be attributed to a human source, it functions in essentially the same manner

¹¹ Kierkegaard, 35.

¹² Ibid.

as the previous argument. Since appealing to a human author will not account for the substance of the story, it must have a divine origin. Moreover, since this claim is a Christian claim, it suggests that particularly Christianity has some divine authority.

Evans locates the third apologetic argument in the appendix to the third chapter. In the appendix, Climacus argues that there are two passionate responses that one might have to encountering the incarnation. Either there will be the “happy encounter,” which occurs when the disciple approaches God in the passion of faith, or there will be an “unhappy encounter,” which occurs when the prospective student misunderstands the incarnation.¹³ Climacus refers to the unhappy encounter as the offense. The unhappy encounter results from the offensive nature of the paradoxical absurdity that is the incarnation. The claim that it is possible for something to be both fully god and fully man is offensive to reason. To assert that both the infinitely potent qualities ascribed to a god and the finite capacity of man in a single living god-man is paradoxical. Given this, Climacus reasons, surely any rational thinker would avoid assenting to such a proposition. More importantly, the rational mind would likely find the assertion of an incarnate god intellectually offensive. Climacus indicates, however, that the paradoxical character of the incarnation is evidence for the divine origin of the story. Evans argues that, if we believe that someone truly receives a legitimate revelation from God, then it would only make sense that this revelation would be something that would rise above our ability to articulate intelligibly, and we could not expect to comprehend it. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that these claims, which propose to provide an

¹³ Ibid, 49.

account of the work of a divine source, are incomprehensible. The argument comes down to the assertion that the sheer implausibility of the Christian story is evidence for its divine inspiration. Evans strengthens his apologetic interpretation of these claims by appealing to a similar argument in Aquinas, which I will not rehearse here.

Evans believes that the text as a whole represents the final apologetic argument. In order to outline this argument Evans reviews the general structure of the book considering each chapter. When he reviews the text in this manner, it becomes clear that we can understand each chapter as working toward making Christianity more intelligible. Throughout the text, Climacus presents Christianity, or at least something very similar to it, as a superior alternative to the Socratic method of achieving true knowledge. Generally, Evans believes that the structure reveals an extended argument for the superiority of Christianity as a method of achieving truth, which suggests to him that the text can be read as demonstrating that something like Christianity is true.

Evans concludes that *Philosophical Fragments*, when viewed as a whole, is clearly a book that can be read as if it were intended to make Christian views more plausible, claiming:

Thus, *Philosophical Fragments* as a whole, read from beginning to end, seems as if it could be designed to make Christian faith more plausible, despite the repeated claims to the contrary. The ease with which the book can be read as an apologetic argument suggests that this reading may not simply be an example of “deconstructing the text” by making the author say the opposite of what is intended. It suggests that apologetics of a sort may be what the author intended.¹⁴

¹⁴ Evans, 72.

Though it seems that Climacus is often trying to make Christianity appear less reasonable, we can understand him as presenting a sustained case for the truth of Christianity.

Avoiding the Contradiction

I have summarized Evans's position that Climacus presents apologetic arguments throughout *Philosophical Fragments*, and this suggests that one can read the text as an attempt to make something like Christianity more plausible. Evans reasons that the presence of both apologetic arguments and claims that seem to reject apologetic arguments presents the reader with an exclusive disjunction; namely, either Climacus is acting in a blatantly contradictory manner, or there must be some way of reconciling the apparently contradictory content. Evans does not believe that Climacus is acting in a contradictory manner; rather, he believes Climacus allows room for some apologetic arguments while rejecting others. Evans claims that, though he may not have been aware of it, Climacus was engaged in a novel form of apologetics. Thus, in the second part of his essay, Evans attempts to distinguish between apologetic arguments that Climacus would accept and the arguments that he would not accept. I will now summarize how Evans addresses the anti apologetic remarks in the text.

Evans attributes two positions to Climacus that dictate whether or not he will accept a given apologetic argument. First, Climacus consistently rejects apologetic arguments that attempt to reduce or eliminate the need for faith in religious belief. Second, Climacus opposes the tendency of apologists to make religious belief appear inoffensive. Since Climacus believes that an incarnation is paradoxical and, as such,

offensive to reason, he rejects apologetic arguments that attempt to avoid the offensive character of the incarnation. Consequently, the sort of apologetic arguments that Climacus allows do not eliminate the role of faith and the potential for offense. Evans takes it as his task to consider what each of these arguments would look like.¹⁵

Evans offers two examples of arguments that violate the ban on these tactics. The first example seeks to demonstrate the existence of God by appealing to deduction; that is, where, once the premises are accepted, the conclusion that God exists necessarily follows. Arguments of this form make faith unnecessary and treat belief as a strictly cognitive task.¹⁶ The second example Evans provides is the tradition of historical apologetics. The historical apologist attempts to appeal to various historical data to establish the factual existence of the incarnate God in the form of Christ. Climacus rejects these apologetic accounts, because they attempt to avoid the offense that exists in the paradoxical assertion of an incarnate God. This does not necessarily mean that Climacus objects to the historical investigation of Christ qua history, but it should not be viewed as anything more than a strictly historical endeavor.

Evans argues that both examples are best described as “classical foundationalist” apologetics. Evans labels them as such because of their employment of certain epistemological claims, namely, classical foundationalist claims. Evans describes classical foundationalism as an epistemological theory which pursues certainty in all beliefs. The classical epistemological foundationalist requires that belief be “the kind of

¹⁵ Ibid, 73.

¹⁶ Evans suggests that some interpretations of Thomas Aquinas’s 5 ways might fall in to this category. Ibid, 75.

thing that any sane rational person who is in the appropriate position can understand and recognize as true.”¹⁷ Evans describes classical foundationalist apologetics as a strategy that “lessens the need for faith and...appears to make offense less possible.”¹⁸ Thus, because Climacus views the notion of an incarnate God as something that a reasonable person would find offensive, the foundationalist apologist could not accept Climacus’ account of the incarnation.

By contrast, Evans argues, Climacus accepts “non-foundationalist” apologetics because they accommodate his tactical ban. In illustrating non-foundationalist apologetics, Evans appeals to Climacus’ discussion of Socrates’ argument from design, which he advances in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*.¹⁹ Socrates’ argument is that nature expresses design, and any design that one finds in nature requires an ultimate designer, a being who has endowed nature with these purposive features. Socrates concludes that nature is the work of a creative designer. Unlike other renditions of the argument from design, Climacus believes that Socrates presupposes the existence of God. Evans reads Climacus’ favorable attitude toward this argument as a sign that he is open to arguments for belief that presuppose the existence of God. This position is consistent with Climacus’ because it does not eliminate the need for faith, but requires it. Furthermore, if we understand this argument in a Christian context, it would also entail the acceptance

¹⁷ Ibid, 74.

¹⁸ Ibid, 75.

¹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong, (Princeton:Princeton UP, 1992.), 292.

of the paradoxical notion of the incarnation, and, thus, this argument fulfills the requirement that apologetic arguments must risk offense.

Evans acknowledges that such an argument is circular. That is, the argument from design establishes that God exists necessarily if one presupposes the existence of God. What then is the value of an argument when the conclusion is presupposed? Evans believes that there are two respects in which this sort of argument can still be considered valuable. First, the argument has the capacity to strengthen the believer's convictions. Even if others will be incapable of recognizing the connection between the natural world and theism, it does not follow that these links cannot be recognized by the believer. Second, it is possible that those who do not have faith might still recognize a design in nature, and would thus have a reason for belief.²⁰

Evans thinks this approach is nonfoundationalist in two respects. First, our experience of nature, the experience that informs our conclusions about purpose and design, is largely, if not altogether, subjective. Since classical foundationalism requires objective criteria for determining validity, Socrates' argument from design does not fit Evans's account of classical foundationalist apologetics. Second, because we can anticipate that others might reject our view of nature, we are open to the possibility that others will have a different view of nature. The classical foundationalists, as Evans construes them, are opposed to such openness of interpretation, as they require beliefs to

²⁰ Evans, 79

be based on objective criteria. Under the classical foundationalist's view, there should only be one reasonable conclusion available.²¹

Though the suggestion that *Philosophical Fragments* contains apologetic arguments seems to contradict claims that Climacus makes, Evans believes that he demonstrates that no such contradiction exists. It is his position that Climacus only rejects classical foundationalist apologetic arguments, but allows for nonfoundationalist arguments. As long as the apologetic arguments allow room for offense and faith remains a necessary component of belief, these arguments are consistent with the principles that Evans attributes to Climacus.

Some Reasons for Being Suspicious of Evans's View

Though I believe Evans is correct in pointing to parts of the text as appearing to be apologetic, we must ask whether or not such a straightforward reading is consistent with Climacus' own description of his task generally and his task in *Philosophical Fragments* particularly. There are three reasons for thinking that Evans treatment of *Philosophical Fragments* is incomplete. First, apologetic arguments could fit within the scope of Climacus' self-described project, but not precisely as Evans has described them. By examining claims made in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* it is clear that Climacus does not intend to make any inquiry, including religious ones, easier. If the sort of apologetic arguments that Evans points out are attempts to make religious beliefs more palatable, then Climacus would reject such arguments. Second, Evans appears to offer only a formal restatement of *Philosophical Fragments*; that is, he offers a

²¹ Ibid, 78.

straightforward reading of the text, with the intention of highlighting it as an apologetic work along the way. Climacus, however, informs us that we are to reject strictly “didactic” readings as properly expressing the actual message of the text.²² Finally, Climacus tells us that he intends to communicate knowledge to the reader by removing knowledge.²³ Under Evans’s reading it appears that we get a straightforward apologetic report, but he does not explain how his reading fits into Climacus description of the text as taking away knowledge and reintroducing knowledge. Together these points provide strong reasons for rejecting Evans’s straightforward reading of the role of the apologetic claims in *Philosophical Fragments*.

The first reason for viewing Evans’s argument as incomplete is rooted in the way that Climacus describes his project as a writer. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus provides the reader with an account of his motivation as an author. He states:

There remains only one possible danger, namely, that the ease becomes so great that it becomes altogether too great; then there is only one want left, though it is not yet a felt want, when people will want difficulty. Out of love for mankind, and out of despair at my embarrassing situation, seeing that I had accomplished nothing and was unable to make anything easier than it had already been, and moved by genuine interest in those who make everything easy, I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere.²⁴

²² Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 275.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 85-187.

The key claim here is Climacus' assertion that his project helps create "difficulties everywhere." In an age rife with foundationalist assumptions, as indeed virtually all sociologists have observed regarding modernity, Climacus is setting himself apart as someone who stands against readily accessible truths. Thus, Climacus' comment provides strong evidence for rejecting Evans's suggestion that *Philosophical Fragments* may have been written to allow room for apologetic arguments.

In response to my objection, Evans might appeal to Climacus' "positive assessment" of Socrates' design argument as an example of Climacus explicitly endorsing an apologetic argument.²⁵ In Socrates' argument from design Climacus picks out an apologetic argument that presupposes the existence of a God, and, according to Evans, Climacus appears to offer a favorable reading of it. However, it is far from clear that Climacus' reading of Socrates is an endorsement of apologetics *qua* apologetics. For instance, when Climacus states "[Socrates] constantly presupposes that god exists, and on this presupposition he seeks to infuse nature with the idea of fitness and purposiveness,"²⁶ Climacus is not stating a proposition concerning the *strengthening* of belief; rather, Climacus merely tells us what Socrates sought to do. Additionally, if the context of the discussion is taken seriously, it becomes clear that Climacus was not necessarily endorsing Socrates' argument from design. Climacus approaches Socrates within a broader discussion regarding proofs for the existence of God. That we cannot demonstrate the existence of god by a proof is his primary point. Climacus concludes

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 44.

²⁶ Ibid.

the only manner in which God's existence can be demonstrated is by asserting that God exists as a premise. Climacus discusses Socrates' argument from design as an example that is consistent with this principle, but it is a stretch to assume that he endorses it.

The second and third reasons to reject Evans's suggestion that Climacus intended to leave room for apologetic arguments are rooted in comments Climacus offers about a review of his *Philosophical Fragments*, and in which he states the following regarding this review:

His report is accurate and on the whole dialectically reliable, but now comes the hitch: although the report is accurate, anyone who reads only that will receive an utterly wrong impression of the book... The report is didactic, purely and simply didactic; consequently the reader will receive the impression that the pamphlet is also didactic. As I see it, this is the most mistaken impression one can have of it. The contrast of form, the teasing resistance of the imaginary construction to the content, the inventive audacity (which even invents Christianity), the only attempt made to go further (that is, further than the so-called speculative constructing), the indefatigable activity of irony, the parody of speculative thought in the entire plan, the satire in making efforts as if something *ganz Auszerordentliches und zwar Neues* [altogether extraordinary, that is, new] were to come of them, whereas what always emerges is old-fashioned orthodoxy in all its rightful severity—of all this the reader finds no hint in the report.²⁷

This observation motivates the second criticism of Evans's argument. As Stephen Mulhall has pointed out elsewhere,²⁸ these criticisms make it clear that there is a tension between the form and content of the text, and one ought not lose sight of the presence of irony and satire when reading *Philosophical Fragments*, and the reasons for this will

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 274-275.

²⁸ Stephen Mulhall, "God's Plagiarist: The Philosophical Fragments of Johannes Climacus," *Philosophical Investigations* 22, no. 2, (1999), 5-6.

become clear in the next chapter. Consequently, this suggests that a reading of the text can be completely accurate in recounting the argument therein, but might fail to grasp the underlying message.

When we view Evans's argument in light of this observation the problem with his argument becomes clear. By offering a straightforward, and in that respect accurate, recounting of the text, Evans has risked falling into the same trap as the German reviewer of whom Climacus speaks. It is clear that Climacus believes a 'dialectically reliable' account lacks essential insights into the meaning of the text. This problem entails another strike against Evans; he fails to address the text as a work that is characterized essentially by parody, irony, and satire. At one point Evans does comment that the fact that one can see the text as an extended argument for Christianity implies that the "pose of neutrality with respect to Christianity on the part of Climacus may be ironically deceptive."²⁹ On this point I agree with Evans, but I think the above passage also indicates that Climacus had a stronger notion of irony in mind; that is, simply feigning neutrality does not appear to constitute what Climacus means by the "indefatigable activity of irony." Though his account is technically accurate, by only briefly considering the role of irony he fails to address Climacus' concerns adequately.

The third concern arises from another passage from the same section of text, where Climacus continues to criticize the reviewer, saying:

And yet the book is so far from being written for nonknowers, to give them something to know, that the person I engage in conversation in this book is always knowledgeable, which seems to indicate that the book is written for people in the know, whose

²⁹ Evans, 70.

trouble is that they know too much. Because everyone knows the Christian truth, it has become such a triviality that a primitive impression of it is acquired only with difficulty. When this is the case, the art of being able to communicate eventually becomes the art of being able to take away or to trick something away from someone. This seems strange and very ironic, and yet I believe I have succeeded in explaining exactly what I mean.

This passage indicates that Climacus desired to communicate Christian truth in *Philosophical Fragments* by means of trickery and removing knowledge. This knowledge being removed is of a particular kind, namely, knowledge of Christianity. Climacus tells us elsewhere that he is attempting to introduce Christianity in a novel manner by removing the reader's previous store of knowledge regarding it, and then reintroducing it in a manner which resists a strictly cognitive acceptance of it.³⁰ Though there is more to say about this, which I will do in the next chapter, the problem this creates for Evans should be clear. The story he tells in his reading of *Philosophical Fragments* is of a project aimed at presenting a sustained case for Christianity. Evans does not remark on the strategy of the text as removing knowledge. We must then ask how Evans's straightforward account of the text works to take something away from the reader. However, Evans nowhere tells us how his account of the text fits in with Climacus' self-described strategy of taking away knowledge.

I have provided three reasons for thinking that Evans is incorrect in his treatment of the apologetic claims in *Philosophical Fragments*. First, it is not reasonable to suppose that Climacus would so fervently attempt to create difficulties everywhere, and still allow apologetic arguments to make belief an easier task in the straightforward

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Postscript*, 275.

manner Evans outlines in his essay. Second, I argued that Climacus' criticism of 'dialectically accurate' readings works against the straightforward reading of *Philosophical Fragments* that Evans advances. Finally, I pointed to Climacus' discussion of the role of the text as removing knowledge in order to reintroduce it in a novel manner, Evans offers no explanation of how his reading of the text seems to fit into this conception of the text. All of these points strongly suggest that Evans is not adequately expressing the intended message of the apologetic arguments in *Philosophical Fragments*.

Closing Remarks

I have provided three reasons for viewing Evans's reading of the role of the apologetic arguments in *Philosophical Fragments* as incomplete. I have not shown that he is incorrect in pointing out that such apologetic arguments are in the work, and this is because I believe that Evans is correct in saying that the text *appears* to advance an apologetic message. However, that it is possible for Evans to have such a reading is entirely consistent with an ironic conception of the work. This simply suggests that Evans has failed to make the ironic movement that undermines his initial reading of the text. In effect, Evan is playing the role of the straight man in a comedy routine; he is the foil. This, however, suggests that we need to take another look at the apologetic nature of the work, and attempt to understand it in a manner consistent with Climacus' remarks. This is the task I shall undertake in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS: AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT

In the previous chapter, I presented a particular reading of *Philosophical Fragments* offered by Stephen Evans, and drew the reader's attention to a number of reasons for being skeptical of his account of the text. The reasons for skepticism were largely based on claims made by Climacus regarding his strategy as an author. In what follows, I will consider what I take to be a richer reading of the text propounded by Stephen Mulhall in his essay "God's Plagiarist: The *Philosophical Fragments* of Johannes Climacus." What is of particular importance is the fact that Mulhall avoids the problems outlined in the previous chapter by using the interpretive claims made by Climacus, which appear to contradict Evans's account, as the guiding assumptions for his analysis of the text. At the close of this chapter, it should be clear that Mulhall offers a particularly rich account of the text.

My discussion in this chapter will progress in three stages. I will begin by outlining Mulhall's treatment of the first three chapters of *Philosophical Fragments*, which he takes as an effort to undermine the Socratic hypothesis. Next, I will consider the manner in which Mulhall's account of the text diverges from the one offered by Evans. We will see that Mulhall draws out an extremely problematic contradiction present in the third chapter of the text, and that important interpretive consequences follow from this. Finally, I will reconsider Evans's view in light of Mulhall's reading of *Philosophical Fragments*.

If I am successful in this chapter, I will have established several consequences. First, we will be able to see that Evans's reading is correct to a degree, and there are good reasons to read the text as he does. However, we will also discover that the value of Evans's account is limited, as he fails to recognize an extremely problematic contradiction in the third chapter. Finally, this discussion will allow us to make helpful observations regarding potential problems in Kierkegaard's *A Literary Review*.

Mulhall on the *Philosophical Fragments*

At the end of the second chapter, I noted that Evans's view is to be rejected because he did not take seriously portions of text in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that revealed Climacus' view of the form of *Philosophical Fragments*. If these passages are to be taken seriously, then it suggests that Evans's reading is somehow incomplete. I will now consider Mulhall's reading of *Philosophical Fragments* in which Mulhall takes as essential components of his analysis the very quotes that I presented as reasons for rejecting Evans's view. In his essay, Mulhall argues that, though it appears that Climacus is advancing the Christian view of truth against the Socratic view of truth, Climacus actually advances a parody of the Christian position that is ultimately self-undermining. By advancing this self-undermining parody Climacus is able to gesture toward a more genuine notion of Christianity. Thus, Mulhall's account of the text does not does entail an anti-Christian reading of *Philosophical Fragments*.

I pointed to three portions of text that indicated Evans's reading of *Philosophical Fragments* is potentially inconsistent with the intended meaning of the text, and two of these quotes were taken from Climacus' response to a German reviewer. The first quote

indicated that one can read the text in a straightforward and consistent manner, and still fail to recognize the central role of irony, parody and satire. The second quote told us that Climacus was attempting to communicate by removing and then introducing knowledge in a novel way. Since these remarks indicate the pseudonymous author's desire to have the text read in a particular way, and also suggest that failing to acknowledge these features of the text can result in a wholly mistaken reading of the text, Mulhall takes these remarks as providing a strategy for properly interpreting the text. He tells us as much when he states the following about Climacus' remarks regarding the German reviewer.

For our purposes, however, what matters is the direct advice it provides concerning how to read *Philosophical Fragments* proper. Any adequate reading must show how this text does not provide new information but rather takes it away, and how its incessant irony, parody, and satire encourage the genuine assimilation of its dialectical content—how overcoming the resistance of its form might serve to make that content more meaningful for its readers.³¹

Thus, Mulhall takes Climacus' claim that he is writing a work of “irony parody and satire” as an assumption and this will permeate his analysis of the work.

Mulhall also makes the assumption that Cartesian thought plays an essential role in *Philosophical Fragments*. He points to the first work by Climacus titled *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. In this work Climacus grapples with Cartesian doubt, and ultimately leaves many of his questions unanswered. Mulhall points to this work, as it is an extended discussion of Cartesian concerns, and yet, little is said about Descartes in either *Philosophical Fragments* or *Concluding Unscientific*

³¹ Mulhall, 5-6.

Postscript. Mulhall takes Climacus' silence regarding the Cartesian concerns that were prominent in Climacus' first work as suspicious. He assumes that "Climacus' text can best be understood as being in continuous but implicit dialogue with Cartesian philosophy."³² This is perhaps the most controversial of Mulhall's assertions, as there are a number of potential explanations for Climacus' silence. It is important not to ignore the fact that *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est* remained unpublished, which perhaps suggests that Kierkegaard was simply dissatisfied with that work. Mulhall acknowledges that the connection he is trying to make is controversial as well, so it is unclear just how seriously we ought to take this assumption. At any rate, reflecting on *Philosophical Fragments* as a dialogue with Cartesian philosophy may be worthwhile, but it is not essential to my project. Having clarified these assumptions, we can now move to the particular claims Mulhall makes about the first three chapters of the text.

Like Evans, Mulhall begins his examination of the first chapter of *Philosophical Fragments* by considering the exchange that occurs between Climacus and his interlocutor. For Mulhall, the most important feature of the first chapter, and what makes the exchange so compelling, is Climacus' discussion of rebirth. Climacus believes that our ignorance of truth is compounded by the absence of a condition that allows us to come to an understanding of the truth. Climacus describes this lacking-of-a-condition as a self-imposed fallen state, i.e., sin. The only way of escaping our ignorance of the truth is by means of a rebirth, a rebirth that we are incapable of bringing

³² Ibid.

about, and, because of this, it must be actualized by an external source, i.e., a divine hand.

Climacus says that this rebirth mirrors the initial transition from non-existence to existence during birth, a transition “from ‘not to be’; to ‘to be!’”³³ However, as a result of this sharp distinction between existence and non-existence, a complication arises. Climacus tells us that only an existing individual can comprehend this transition. That is to say, an existing individual is capable of imagining a time when she was not yet born and, thus, she can conceptualize of a time when she did not exist, and, alternately, the not yet born are incapable of conceiving of a time after birth, i.e., as existing. The case of the non yet born is similar to the case of the non-existent. Non-existing individuals are not capable of comprehending themselves as truly existing. This notion of rebirth, claims Mulhall, is an inversion of the Cartesian claim “*cogito ergo sum.*” The claim inverts Descartes in the respect that we are presently in a state of non-existence, and yet it appears that we are still capable of thought. The argument that existence is grounded in the capacity for thought is undermined by the view that, though we are thinking, we are not truly reborn and so are not truly existing. Though he views it as a dialogue with Descartes, Mulhall acknowledges that the exchange with the interlocutor serves an apologetic purpose, telling us that the non-human authorship of the non-Socratic position follows from the central notion of rebirth.

Although Mulhall reads the second chapter in a different manner than Evans does, his reading can still be understood as apologetic. As was noted in the previous

³³ Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, 20.

chapter, the second chapter of Climacus' text presents an account of the incarnation. Mulhall, contra Evans, claims that it is not simply the novelty of the incarnation that suggests the truth of the gospel, but it is also, and more importantly, the notion that God needs us. This fits into Mulhall's reading of *Philosophical Fragments* as an inversion of Descartes because Descartes propounds a notion of a God who is free of imperfections. Descartes goes so far as to claim that our existence depends upon God. In Climacus' picture, God needs humanity as a lover needs his beloved. Though Mulhall emphasizes a portion of the text that Evans does not, he draws a similar conclusion regarding chapter two, namely, that no human can truly be identified as the source of the view of the god presented therein. It is the novelty of the notion of a god that needs humanity, and the Socratic inability to account for it, that implies that the Socratic approach to truth is flawed.

Mulhall takes the third chapter of *Philosophical Fragments* to be a further response to the belief that the non-Socratic hypothesis could have been a human invention. Climacus uses the chapter to argue that the principles humans employ in order to come to knowledge of something fail to grasp the paradoxical nature of the non-Socratic hypothesis. The chapter confronts the modern follower with their inability to grasp the paradoxical character of the non-Socratic hypothesis.

The paradoxical character of the non-Socratic hypothesis is a product of Climacus equating the god with the unknowable. For the unknowable to be truly unknowable, it cannot have any relation to that which is known, i.e., it must be absolutely different. If the understanding has any relation to it by means of which it can

orient itself to it, it would not be truly unknowable. Further, if there were any attempt to demarcate the unknowable from the knowable, one could simply come to an understanding of the unknowable by means of negation. The difference between what is knowable and what cannot be known must be absolute and, as Mulhall points out, this absolute difference entails the following:

The understanding must therefore negate itself absolutely, negate even its grasp of the difference as absolutely different from itself, since that too amounts to a relation between it and the difference (by way of self-negation), and so a negation of it as absolutely different. But this is impossible: if the understanding negated even this relation to the idea of the absolutely different, it would not stand in any relation to it at all – in other words, it would be absolutely ungraspable. Instead...the understanding continues to think the idea of absolute difference by using itself – that is, by thinking of the unknown as absolutely different from itself, and so as the negation of itself in some respect or other.³⁴

Since, according to Climacus, the god is just the unknowable, when the understanding attempts to grasp the idea of a god it will always construe the god in terms of a negated part of the knowable. Every attempt to advance knowledge about the unknown will fail because the unknowable must be absolutely different from the knowable, and so the attempts at grasping something of the god will only result in the illusion of illumination and a movement further away from the knowledge of god. This account of the god is a problem for the Socratic position because the modern follower of Socrates believes that she can arrive at knowledge of the god.

The problems for the modern follower of Socrates are compounded by Climacus' belief that the unknowable is

³⁴ Mulhall, 14.

...the passion of thought, and the thinker without paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow. But the ultimate potentiation of every passion is always to will its own downfall, and so it is also the ultimate passion of the understanding to will the collision, although in one way or another the collision must become its downfall. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.³⁵

Thus, the problems that mire the attempts to come to an understanding of the unknowable are unavoidable. Thought desires paradox and so will seek out the unknowable. The trouble for the modern Socratic thinker is clear: Given the way that Climacus has characterized her, the modern Socratic thinker believe that she is capable of knowing the unknowable and fails to recognize the fact that she is destined to grapple with unanswerable questions.

It is important to acknowledge that Plato often presents Socrates as well aware of the fact that he may be pursuing unanswerable questions. For example, in the *Meno* Socrates tells Meno the following:

...but I would contend at all costs in both word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.³⁶

Thus, not only is Socrates aware of the potentially unanswerable nature of his enquiries, but he also believes that they are still worthwhile endeavors. I do not wish to engage in the longstanding debate regarding which Socrates is the real Socrates, but it should at least be clear that the picture of the modern Socratic thinker that Climacus outlines is not

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, 37.

³⁶ Plato, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, Second Edition, trans. G.M.A. Grube, ed. John M. Cooper, (Hackett Publishing Co.: Indianapolis, 2002), 78.

necessarily an accurate picture of a Socratic thinker in the early dialogues. It appears that the Socratic thinker Climacus has in mind is one who believes that these unanswerable questions are answerable.

Though Mulhall's reading of particular parts of the text differs from the account that Evans provides, they both make consistent claims. Evans attempts to emphasize that these portions of the text can be interpreted as making an explicit case for the religious position. Mulhall, however, suggests that these claims are better understood as undermining the Socratic alternative of achieving truth, and they do not necessarily make a positive case for Christianity. Trivially, to say that a claim works to undermine a position is consistent with saying that this claim can also be interpreted as providing support for an alternative position. Mulhall appears to resist a reading of the text that interprets the first three chapters as making a positive case for the religious alternative. However, it is not clear what his account loses by admitting that there is a way in which Climacus' first three chapters can be understood as apologetic. In fact, Evans and Mulhall appear to read the text in a similar fashion. If Evans's remarks regarding the sections that Mulhall comments on are not inconsistent and potentially complimentary, then we can look at the direction Mulhall takes his analysis and ask how Evans's account changes in light of what Mulhall reveals.

Revealing the Contradiction

I have shown that Mulhall's initial account of the first three chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* is consistent with the apologetic reading that Evans believes is possible. However, Mulhall does not end his discussion of the third chapter here. He

offers a crucial insight when he observes that the paradox that Climacus is accusing the modern follower of Socrates of violating is also a problem for Climacus. Mulhall points out the following remark made by Climacus:

If a human being is to come to truly know something about the unknown (the god), he must first come to know that it is different from him, absolutely different from him. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (Since, as we have seen, this is a contradiction); if it is going to come to know this, it must come to know this from the god, and if it does come to know this it cannot understand this and consequently cannot come to know this, for how could it understand the absolutely different?...If the god is absolutely different from a human being, then the human being is absolutely different from the god – but how is the understanding to grasp this? At this point we seem to stand at a paradox.³⁷

Mulhall goes on to observe the following:

...even if we assume divine authorship and delivery of the absolutely different, it would still *ex hypothesi* be ungraspable even by those who want to use it as part of their elaboration of the non-Socratic hypothesis, or as part of their defense of it against what they see as intellectual hubris of their Socratically-minded opponents.³⁸

By accusing the followers of Socrates of violating the limits of the unknown, Climacus walks into a paradox. That is to say, in outlining his criticism of the follower of Socrates, Climacus engages in an extended analysis of the difference between the knowable and unknowable, claiming that the modern follower of Socrates attempts to know what they are ultimately incapable of knowing. However, for Climacus to accuse the modern Socratic thinker of attempting to know what they cannot know suggests that

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fragments*, 46.

³⁸ Mulhall, 17.

Climacus can demarcate the difference between the knowable and unknowable. In the passage cited above, Climacus tells us that our attempts to understand this difference leads us into a paradox. Thus, Climacus, by commenting on the difference between the knowable and unknowable in his criticism of the modern Socratic thinker, places himself in a relation to the unknown, the very act he claims is paradoxical.

One potential solution for Climacus is to claim that he received knowledge of the absolute difference between the knowable and unknowable from a divine source. However, Mulhall goes on to point out that the problem is compounded by Climacus' admission that he is not himself transformed and his claim that only the truly transformed are capable of being in a relation to the absolutely different, saying:

But if only transformed human beings can grasp the non-Socratic hypothesis, anyone offering to explain and defend that hypothesis would not only be presumptuously putting themselves forward as divinely redeemed, but should also appreciate that their offer was futile – since the only people for whom an explanation and defense of the hypothesis might be useful would be entirely unable to grasp it.³⁹

Climacus purported to reveal something of the non-Socratic hypothesis. However, this hypothesis can only be understood by those who have been transformed in a relationship to the divine. Since Climacus nowhere claims to be transformed, and we have no reason to believe that he is in a relationship with the god, it appears that Climacus is attempting to communicate a message that he cannot understand. Further, even if Climacus has been transformed by a divine power, it would be useless for him to attempt to communicate the newfound truth to those who have not yet been transformed, as they

³⁹ Ibid, 18.

lack the condition for understanding this knowledge. The problem is now clear. Climacus is attempting to communicate a message that he could not know, and his audience could not understand.

Mulhall goes on to point out that the problems that arise in light of these claims are not restricted to the third chapter. Mulhall believes that Climacus suggests that all attempts to arrive at knowledge of the unknowable by means of a negation fail. The first two arguments that Climacus advances against the modern follower of Socrates function by lauding a feature of the non-Socratic model that is a negated version of some feature of the Socratic position. Climacus has thus failed to offer an argument that shows the Socratic and non-Socratic positions are truly different. Since Climacus develops his discussion of the non-Socratic position by means of this negation, he never presents us with a true alternative. Thus, there are problems with both the argument leveled against the Socratic position and the construction of the non-Socratic alternative.

Mulhall draws our attention back to the beginning of the text, pointing out that Climacus begins his discussion by asking a Socratic question; i.e., ‘can the truth be learned?’, and suggests that Climacus, by beginning with a Socratic question, never truly transcends the Socratic approach to the truth. This means that in his presentation of the non-Socratic position he commits the very mistakes that he attributes to the modern follower of Socrates.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Ibid, 23-24.

After revealing the contradiction implicit in Climacus' metaphysical caprice and its far-reaching effects, Mulhall goes on to consider the message of *Philosophical Fragments*, noting that:

Climacus claimed in the *Postscript* that his aim in *Fragments* was to re-present our knowledge of Christianity in such a way that it is no longer meaningless to us. This claim explicitly denies that the non-Socratic hypothesis is literally unknowable or unthinkable; it says rather that it has come to mean nothing to us – that we cannot see how or why we might come to think of ourselves or our lives in the particular terms it proposes. In short, the real problem for Climacus is to get us to see the existential or spiritual point of Christianity—to appreciate once again the true nature of the existential challenge it poses.⁴¹

By appearing to address religious questions by means of the understanding, i.e., Socratic analysis, *Philosophical Fragments* becomes a parody of the attempts to achieve a genuine religious life by means of the understanding. The self-undermining that occurs in the third chapter does not necessarily show that the understanding is incapable of conceptualizing religious questions in every case—and that is not the point!—but it does show that Climacus' attempt to address religious questions by means of the understanding is inappropriate. By “inappropriate”, I mean that when the understanding is employed in religious discussions it fails to provide the proper context of religious discussions. When religious language is used outside of the proper religious context, it fails to attain the proper meaning. Thus, I think that the best way of reading *Philosophical Fragments* is as a text that makes a primarily normative point. What we see in Climacus is a parody of religious epistemology intent on demonstrating the comic inappropriateness of an approach that places the understanding at the forefront and at the

⁴¹ Ibid, 25.

same time gestures toward a normative conception of these concerns. Just as it is possible to greet a stranger with a kiss—to do so may have interesting consequences—it is also not completely ruled out that the understanding is capable of approaching religious questions. However, Climacus does reveal that such behavior seems comically inappropriate.

Mulhall devotes the rest of his essay to revealing how the rest of *Philosophical Fragments* works to support his reading, but I will forgo a comprehensive summary and analysis of the rest of his argument. I believe that we have already arrived at the most important insight of the text, namely, the *Philosophical Fragments* demonstrates that applying the understanding to religious questions is inappropriate and has potentially comic consequences.

Evans's Argument Reconsidered

Having clarified Mulhall's account, we can now reconsider the interpretation of *Philosophical Fragments* offered by Evans. As was noted in the previous chapter, Evans offers a reading of the text that does not appear to take seriously the remarks made by Climacus in other texts that provide advice for how one ought to properly read *Philosophical Fragments*. Evans's blunt reading of the text suffers because he does not recognize the contradiction in the third chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*. Evans claims that Climacus argues that reason is capable of recognizing its own limits, and he sees no inconsistency in the way Climacus claims this. The suggestion that reason is capable of grasping its own limits is akin to suggesting that we can somehow demarcate a position beyond which reason can go no further. However, as we have just seen, if

Climacus advocates this position, then *he* is violating his restriction that the known remains distinct from the unknown. Reason would be required to recognize a difference between that which it is capable of grasping and that which it cannot grasp, and this is impossible for Climacus. I must emphasize that I do not think that we can conclude from Climacus' contradictory account that all attempts to demarcate a boundary for reason are impossible.

It should be noted that Evans would likely challenge Mulhall's claim that Climacus is contradicting himself in chapter three of *Philosophical Fragments*. Though Evans does not address the ability to draw a limit for reason in the essay I addressed in the first chapter, he does comment on this issue in some of his other work. In his book *Faith Beyond Reason* Evans argues that limits can be drawn in the respect that Kant or the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* attempt to draw such limits.⁴² My response is simply to note that Mulhall makes a strong case that the limits that Climacus discusses in the third chapter appear to be problematic for Climacus. The mere fact that a limit might be possible does not necessarily mean that Climacus has effectively drawn such a limit. Evans would have to have argued that Climacus, in particular, does not contradict himself. Further, Mulhall's reading would appear consistent with Climacus' remarks that the text is a work of irony, parody, and satire.

Additionally, in the second chapter of my thesis one may have objected to my appeal to Climacus' remarks about the German reviewer as posing problems for Evans's reading of *Philosophical Fragments*. That is, Evans could easily have argued that I had

⁴² Evans, C. Stephen, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.), 70.

not offered any reason to trust Climacus' remarks about the text. However, it is clear that the problems that arise in the third chapter of the text appear explicable in one of two ways. Kierkegaard is either simply incompetent and commits himself to advancing an argument that he is not able to recognize as illogical, or the contradiction is intentional. Given the advice Climacus offers on reading the text, it appears obvious that it is more reasonable to understand the contradiction as playing a role in Climacus' ironic, satiric, and parodistic enterprise, rather than being the oversight of an incompetent writer. In this respect, the contradiction provides an even stronger reason to take Climacus' remarks seriously.

Closing Remarks

Though Evans and Mulhall have accounts of the first three chapters of the text that do not conflict, Mulhall's account of the text diverges drastically when he recognizes the contradiction that arises from Climacus' account of the knowable and unknowable in the third chapter. If Mulhall's reading is correct, then the non-Socratic alternative trumpeted by Climacus is simply a parody of the Christian position that never truly transcends the Socratic, and when the limits of reason come under scrutiny, the position is "hoist by its own petard."⁴³ However, when the position collapses, it is not simply a negative event. Rather, it allows Climacus to demonstrate the inappropriateness of attempting to address religious questions by means of the understanding, i.e., as a Socratic thinker. In the next chapter, we will see how the

⁴³ Mulhall, 19.

method employed in the *Philosophical Fragments* might explain some of the problematic issues that arise in *A Literary Review*.

CHAPTER IV

CONSIDERING A *LITERARY REVIEW*

I now turn my attention to considering Kierkegaard's work *A Literary Review*.⁴⁴

In the present chapter, I will reflect on some potential problems in this work as outlined in an essay by Daniel W. Conway entitled "Modest Expectations: Kierkegaard's Reflections on the Present Age."⁴⁵ Conway claims that Kierkegaard advances disparate claims about the role of reflexion and of religious authenticity. My task will be to consider whether Mulhall's reading of *Philosophical Fragments* offers any promising insight into how one might be able to make sense of the vexing claims Conway locates in *A Literary Review*. I will demonstrate that, though *Philosophical Fragments* appears to be an unlikely solution to the problem in *A Literary Review*, it still emerges as a potential solution.

I will advance my point in several phases. I begin by first commenting on why it is important to take *A Literary Review* seriously, even though compared to Kierkegaard's other works it might appear peculiar. Next, I will attempt to summarize the major features of *A Literary Review* and summarize Conway's account of the problem it raises. I will then consider, generally, why *Philosophical Fragments* appears to bear a special

⁴⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age, A Literary Review*, trans. ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna V. Hong, (Princeton:Princeton UP, 1978.)

⁴⁵ Conway, Daniel W. "Modest Expectations: Kierkegaard's Reflections on the Present Age" in *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook 1999*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser, (de Gruyter: New York, 1999.)

relationship to *A Literary review*, and consider how it might offer some solutions to the problems Conway outlines in the text.

Taking the *Review* Seriously

A Literary Review is a peculiar work by Kierkegaard in that he seemingly departs from some of the tools he commonly uses as a writer. Unlike most of his previous works, Kierkegaard does not employ the use of a pseudonym and the work itself primarily consists of an analysis and review of another author's work, namely, *Two Ages* by Thomasine Christine Gyllembourg-Ehrensward. Though attaching his own name to a work is not unprecedented, Kierkegaard often only abandoned his pseudonyms for works that were explicitly religious, and since *A Literary Review* is not an explicitly religious work the lack of a pseudonym is peculiar. The use of a review also appears out of character for Kierkegaard and at the very least we might wonder about how seriously we ought to take a review; after all, it is not very common for thinkers to communicate their most important ideas *via* the medium of a book review. Confronted with these facts we may be unsure whether we ought to give the work special status because it is attributed to Kierkegaard, meaning it somehow represent his true views, or that we ought to take it less seriously because it is merely a review.

Alastair Hannay points out that Kierkegaard does not depart from his general method of toying with the notion of authorship, and he does so by drawing our attention to the following journal entry in the introduction to his translation of *A Literary Review*:

To now I have served by helping the pseudonyms become authors. What if I decided from now to do what little writing I can indulge in in the form of criticism, putting what I had to say in reviews which developed my thoughts

out of some book or other? So they could also be found in the book. Then at least I'd avoid being an author.⁴⁶

Hannay notes that Kierkegaard can now maintain the desired authorial distance from his works by letting it appear as though the ideas he offers in his review are generated by the author of the reviewed text and are not necessarily his own. It is perhaps telling that Kierkegaard's review of "Two Ages" is often referred to as "Two Ages," and I imagine this fact would please him, as it creates further ambiguity about the identities of the authors. This also suggests to the reader that, though *A Literary Review* is a departure from his other methods, Kierkegaard saw this work as functioning in a similar manner as his pseudonymous works. The fact that the work is merely a review is not grounds for not taking the work seriously.

A Brief Summary of *A Literary Review*

In *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard picks up on the author's distinction between the "Age of Revolution" and "the present age," and uses this distinction to mount a major criticism of contemporary Danish culture. Kierkegaard tells us that the Age of Revolution is characterized by passion, that is, a deep commitment to the causes of the age. The present age lacks direction, and is characterized by excessive reflection, careful deliberation, and an inability to be decisive.

Because the Age of Revolution is passionate, many other qualities follow, e.g., form, culture, violence towards everything but the defining idea, decorum, immediacy, make up just a brief list of the many attributes that Kierkegaard claims characterize the

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *A Literary Review*, trans. Alaistar Hannay, (Penguin Books: New York, 2001.), Ibid, xi.

Age of Revolution. However, what seems to be most important for Kierkegaard is the ability of the Age of Revolution, with its defining idea, to imbue a society and an individual with a meaningful existence, and the equilibrium that follows.

The Age of Revolution is sharply contrasted with the present age as an age in which the defining idea has disintegrated. In *A Literary Review*, Kierkegaard makes the consequences of this disintegration clear:

If the essential passion is taken away, the one motivation and everything becomes meaningless externality, devoid of character, then the spring of ideality stops flowing and life together becomes stagnant water...⁴⁷

Kierkegaard describes the present age telling us that it is an age characterized by deliberation, giving us the tragically comic image of a suicide victim who so carefully deliberates whether he should take his own life that he is strangled by the process. “A premeditated suicide he was not, but a suicide by means of premeditation.”⁴⁸ The comical aside, Kierkegaard presents a seriously bleak picture of the sort of trap that reflection becomes. I take it that Kierkegaard believes it traps us because there is no directing idea, it is reflection for reflection’s sake. When given a choice between action or reflection, reflection will always win.

Conway's Concern

Conway's concern can be stated in the following way: The totality of the age and the excessive reflection and degenerative leveling that characterize Kierkegaard's contemporary Denmark are only overcome by achieving a genuinely religious life, but

⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 62.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 68-69.

the manner in which Kierkegaard describes a defining idea makes the religious solution appear unlikely. What Conway is most interested in is how Kierkegaard works out the relationship between the freedom necessary for a genuine religious existence and the necessary limits imposed upon the individual by the age she finds herself in and the curious fact that some ages may allow for an authentic religious existence while others do not.

What Kierkegaard means by an “age” is rather comprehensive and overarching in its scope and influence. Kierkegaard’s spends considerable time discussing the influence of the age on the individual. Thus, the comprehensive character of an age becomes a problem when we consider Kierkegaard’s notion of reflexion. Conway notes, “Kierkegaard’s appeal to the socializing power of reflexion introduces a formidable element of necessity in his review of the two ages. In accordance with the mechanism of reflexion, individuals involuntarily reflect and embody the character of the age they represent.”⁴⁹ So, we can understand Kierkegaard to mean that the all encompassing features of an age, coupled with the reflexion that takes place wherein individuals mirror the characteristics of their age, suggests that the individual’s ability to act freely, and thereby authentically, may be entirely removed. Said in another way, the individual cannot help but participate in the character of the age, and cannot understand herself apart from the age.

⁴⁹ Conway, 24.

Conway believes that the necessity of the age becomes even more apparent when the role of a defining idea is considered, and he points to the following passage by

Kierkegaard:

When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea, and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and normative. Individually the relation separates them (each one has himself for himself), and ideally it unites them. Where there is essential inwardness, there is a decent modesty between man and man that prevents crude aggressiveness; in the relation of unanimity to the idea there is the elevation that again in consideration of the whole forgets the accidentality of details. Thus the individuals never come too close to each other in the herd sense, simply because they are united on the basis of an ideal distance.⁵⁰

Conway reasons from this claim that a defining idea can ultimately determine whether or not one can foster a genuinely inward and authentic relationship, i.e., 'each one has himself for himself.' It appears that Kierkegaard is advancing a view of the self that is severely encumbered by the historical setting of the age, and this is strange in light of his constant demand for authenticity. What of the individual who does not have the luxury of living in an age in which they are defined in a manner that allows her to pursue herself for herself?

In the present age there is no defining idea and therefore the scenario described in the previous passage, where the society and the individual are properly related to the idea, cannot take place. Since it is the proper relationship obtaining by virtue of the age that allows an authentic existence to take place, it initially appears that a genuinely authentic existence is not possible for an individual in the present age. Of course, the

⁵⁰ *Two Ages*, 62.

notion that it is the age in which one lives that dictates whether or not one can live an authentic existence appears to contrast greatly with the rest of Kierkegaard's works, which appear to suggest that one can in fact live an authentic existence.

The prospect of achieving authenticity in the present age also appears dubious because of the problem of “leveling” Kierkegaard outlines (“leveling” being Kierkegaard’s notion that “all ideas, people, causes and goals will be reduced to mere subjects of reflection and discussion”).⁵¹ Kierkegaard tells us that the leveling tendency is beyond the will of the individuals to prevent, and, in fact, everyone is working in service of it. Conway points to the apocalyptic picture Kierkegaard provides in the following passage:

No particular individual (the eminent personage by reason of excellence and the dialectic of fate) will be able to halt the abstraction of leveling, for it is a negatively superior force, and the age of heroes is past. No assemblage will be able to halt the abstraction of levelling, for in the context of reflection the assemblage itself is in the service of leveling. The abstraction of levelling...will stay with us, as they say of a tradewind that consumes everything.⁵²

Thus, it appears that the prospect for an authentic existence to take form is not just bleak, but potentially impossible; strangely, this is not what Kierkegaard concludes.

Kierkegaard reveals that the present age, despite its excessive reflection, is in fact an age that allows for a genuine religious existence. Further, Kierkegaard tells us it is by

⁵¹ Conway, 32.

⁵² *Two Ages*, 87.

virtue of the excessive reflection in the present age that makes a religious leap possible.⁵³

Conway remarks on Kierkegaard's apparent change in position, saying:

Despite his account of the present age as enervated, dispassionate, irresolute, and irremediably decadent, Kierkegaard nevertheless celebrates the age for delivering its representatives to the threshold of a momentous either/or: "every individual either is lost or, disciplined by the abstraction, finds himself religiously..." Rather than resign himself to the excessive, self-consuming reflection that marks the present age, he urges his readers to transform their historical destiny into a fortuitous occasion for religious salvation: "Reflection is a snare in which one is trapped, but in and through the inspired leap of religiousness the situation changes and it is the snare that catapults one into the embrace of the eternal."⁵⁴

At this point, the incongruity appears obvious. Given the totality of the age, the disintegration of a defining idea, and the inevitability of leveling, it seems that an individual's orientation to the world is wholly subject to the accidental features of her age, and she has little choice as to whether or not she can maintain an authentic existence. Conway's criticism is that Kierkegaard cannot maintain both his account of the present age and that those who live in it are capable of pursuing a genuinely religious existence.

It is not difficult to sympathize with Conway's confusion. Kierkegaard presents a theory of ages that appears to curtail the possibility of an authentic existence in the present age, and yet he believes that an authentically religious existence is just what the present age makes possible. It should be noted that though Conway believes an authentic religious existence is impossible given Kierkegaard's account of the present

⁵³ *Two Ages*, 96.

⁵⁴ Conway, 33.

age, he does believe Kierkegaard can achieve an instance of repetition, an option that I will not here consider.

Philosophical Fragments and A Literary Review

Having outlined the general features of *A Literary Review*, I would now like to consider why it is reasonable to think that *Philosophical Fragments* can provide insight about some of the remarks in *A Literary Review*. I am certainly not the first to suggest that a potentially important relationship between these works exists,⁵⁵ but I still feel it is worth clarifying why I think there are reasons to look for connections between these works.

If we are to take *The Point of View for My work as an Author*⁵⁶ seriously, then it suggests that Kierkegaard has a rather unified project in his works; consider the following quote from his introduction to this work:

The contents of this little book affirm, then, what I truly am as an author, that I am and was a religious author, that the whole of my work as an author is related to Christianity, or the problem ‘of becoming a Christian’, with a direct or indirect polemic against the monstrous illusion we call Christendom...⁵⁷

Given this passage, it seems clear that Kierkegaard was intent on being a Christian author in the respect that he wanted to write books that could facilitate a genuine

⁵⁵ For example, Robert C. Roberts attempts to make a connection between these works in his essay “Some Remarks on the Concept of Passion,” *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages* 1984 Mercer University Press Macon GA.

⁵⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Report to History*, ed. Benjamin Nelson, trans. Walter Lowrie, (Harper & Row Publishers: New York, 1962.)

⁵⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Point of View*, 5-6.

religious existence. Recognizing this allows us to avoid postulating exclusive intentions in each text, and gives us further reason to think that these works could mutually elucidate their respective meanings. Of course, with this passage in mind, it would be just as reasonable to pick any of Kierkegaard's works and expect it to reveal the same message as any other work we could select. So, it is possible that I have overstated my case. However, there are also reasons to think that we ought to consider specifically *A Literary Review* and *Philosophical Fragments* together.

Philosophical Fragments speaks at great length regarding the understanding and its relationship to religious questions. In the previous chapter, I concluded with Mulhall that the work could be understood as a parody of attempts to employ the understanding in religious concerns. There has been considerable debate regarding the proper way we are to understand Climacus' use of the term 'understanding' (*Forstand*),⁵⁸ but much of this debate surrounds whether Kierkegaard intended the word to be understood in the technical sense (something akin to a Kantian faculty) or as a more colloquial phrase. However, it seems that both ways of understanding the phrase suggest a potential connection with the notion of reflection in *A Literary Review*. Insofar as the "understanding" represents one's ability to comprehend or make sense of the world, it is reasonable to suppose that the excessive reflection that occurs in the present age would be deeply related to Climacus' notion of understanding. In describing the excessive reflection that takes place in the present age Kierkegaard makes it exceedingly clear that

⁵⁸ Andrew Burgess offers an excellent account of how this debate played out in correspondences between Walter Lowrie and David Swenson in "*Forstand* in the Swenson-Lowrie Correspondence and in the 'Metaphysical Caprice'" *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, ed. Robert L. Perkins, (Mercer UP Macon GA, 1994.)

both ‘prudence’ and ‘deliberation’ play important roles in the lives of those who are members of it.⁵⁹ Insofar as individuals want to appear prudent, it is sensible to suppose that they will attempt to make decisions that appear to reflect the proper employment of reason, i.e., the understanding. Likewise, excessive deliberation is marked by a similar desire to act in a careful and reasonable manner, and In both cases it appears that employment of the understanding is a necessary condition for prudence and deliberation.

We can discover another reason for thinking that *Philosophical Fragments* might offer insight into the meaning of *A Literary Review* when we compare comments made by Kierkegaard regarding the purpose of *Philosophical Fragments* and the problem in the present age. In *A Literary Review* Kierkegaard tells us the following of the present age:

We do not want to abolish the monarchy, by no means, but if little by little we could get it transformed into make-believe, we would gladly shout 'Hurrah for the King!'... In the same way we are willing to keep Christian terminology but privately know that nothing decisive is *meant* by it.⁶⁰ (emphasis added).

Here Kierkegaard identifies one of the major problems of the present age as being that Christian terminology no longer means anything decisive. In the previous chapter I quoted an instance where Mulhall reminded us of Climacus' intention in *Philosophical Fragments* by noting “Climacus claimed in the *Postscript* that his aim in the *Fragments* was to re-present our knowledge of Christianity in such a way that it is no longer

⁵⁹ *Two Ages*, 68.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 80-81.

meaningless.”⁶¹ Given this claim, it appears reasonable to think that *Philosophical Fragments* could be seen as a potential antidote to one of the major ills of the present age, and in this respect *Philosophical Fragments* appears to be a promising text to consider as a potential explanation for the problem that Conway outlines.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Climacus constructed a self-undermining parody of Christianity as a means of gesturing toward an alternative method of approaching religious questions. Since the primary targets of *Philosophical Fragments* are attempts to address religious questions by means of the understanding and it appears that an age characterized by reflection would likely obsess over the understanding, *Philosophical Fragments* appears to be a likely response to the present age. At this point, we can see why it is reasonable to suppose that *Philosophical Fragments* may offer some insight regarding remarks made in *A Literary Review*.

Toward a Solution

It now seems reasonable for us to consider the potential for *Philosophical Fragments* to offer a solution to Conway's concern. The question we bring to the text is this: how can Kierkegaard maintain that the age has a total determining influence on the individual, and yet also claim that the individual can live an authentically religious life? Though there is one potential solution that appears as an initial possibility, problems arise immediately after articulating it.

In the previous chapter I explained how Climacus employs self-contradiction to attack the employment of the understanding in religious questions. The strategy was to

⁶¹ Mulhall, 25.

suggest that when someone recognizes the implicit contradiction in the position that Climacus presents, she is forced to reconsider the validity of using the understanding as a means of grasping or answering religious questions, and thus the possibility of a genuine religious existence might emerge. It appears that by noting the paradoxical character of the understanding *Philosophical Fragments* presents a potential strategy for stopping the endless reflection that plagues those in the present age. Thus, in the case of an individual in the present age, the hope would be that by reading a text like *Philosophical Fragments* they would be able to recognize the problems inherent in excessive reflection and the role that the understanding plays in it, thereby allowing the individual to opt out of the excessive reflection that dominates the age.

However, if I am correct in my account of *Philosophical Fragments*, we immediately encounter a problem with the solution I have just proposed. Kierkegaard claims that “The present age is essentially a sensible age, devoid of passion, and therefore it has *nullified the principle of contradiction*.”⁶² Here Kierkegaard tells us that it is the result of an essential character of the present age that the principle of contradiction has been nullified. Coupling this fact with the concerns that Conway outlines above regarding the overarching influence of an age, it suggests that an individual existing in the present age would be incapable of recognizing a contradiction if one presented itself. This means that when Climacus employs contradiction in *Philosophical Fragments* it would remain necessarily unrecognized by the reader in the present age. Furthermore, the problem seems especially curious when we consider

⁶² *Two Ages*, 91.

whether Kierkegaard as an individual in the present age would himself be able to employ contradiction as a means of communication.

Given the fact that Kierkegaard, *via* Climacus, does appear to make use of the notion of contradiction in an attempt to make a religious leap possible, it might be reasonable to question the totality of the influence of the present age. If Kierkegaard truly believed that the age was so complete in its influence, then it appears that his efforts in *Philosophical Fragments* are futile. It is important to not lose sight of the fact that Kierkegaard is writing as a member of the present age, and perhaps his account of the totalizing influence of the age is merely another expression of the age. Immediately this calls into question the validity of Kierkegaard's account of the present age. Though his language about the age is extremely pessimistic, this may just mean that the vast majority of individuals are doomed to live by the standards of the present age, while a select few may still be able to overcome the influence of the age.

Here we return to the question of how someone might be able to overcome the limits of the present age. Once again, I would recommend a return to the method in *Philosophical Fragments*, that is, bringing the reader to a position where they recognize the comical incongruity of addressing religious questions by means of the understanding. However, in order to take this work seriously we must reconsider what it means for the present age to have annulled the law of non-contradiction. It was potentially incorrect for me to assume that the annulment of the law of non-contradiction was in fact an epistemic annulment and that individuals in the present age are incapable of cognizing it. It may be better to understand the annulment of the law of non-contradiction as an

inability to act in the face of a contradiction, which seems to be more consistent with Kierkegaard's broader concerns.

Philosophical Fragments has once again emerged as a possible means of making a religious leap possible. It seems feasible to suppose that some individuals will be able break out of the excessive reflection that plagues the present age by recognizing the comical incongruity of employing the understanding in attempting to address religious questions. However, it should be emphasized that the ability to overcome the limits of the present age would still be extremely rare.

Closing Remarks

In this chapter, I demonstrated that there are some good reasons for being cautiously optimistic that *Philosophical Fragments* presents a potential means of escaping the hyper-reflection of the present age. I began by arguing that it is sensible to take *A Literary Review* seriously as a work. Next, after briefly outlining some of the major ideas working in *A Literary Review*, I summarized Conway's concerns regarding the potential for a genuine religious existence. Faced with Conway's problem, it became clear that *Philosophical Fragments* represents a promising solution. It also became clear that if we take the totality of the age and the annulment of the law of non-contradiction seriously, then the use of *Philosophical Fragments* as a means of escaping the age appears problematic. However, if the influence of the age is not total, and we offer an alternative account of the annulment of the law of non-contradiction, then it might be reasonable to suppose that *Philosophical Fragments* still offers a means of escaping the

hyper-reflection of the present age. Though a genuine religious existence remains unlikely, it now appears possible.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: THE POTENTIAL OF *PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS*

I will now summarize the content of each chapter, and note what I believe I achieved in each section. I will conclude by offering account of the significance of my thesis. Though I think my accomplishments are humble and potentially controversial, I still think I have offered a valuable insight into the relationship between *Philosophical Fragments* and *A Literary Review*.

In Chapter II, I provided three reasons for viewing Evans's reading of the role of *Philosophical Fragments* as a work of apologetics as incomplete. I agreed with Evans that there are apologetic arguments in the text, but claimed his analysis of their function was incomplete. Furthermore, I suggested that it is possible to recognize the presence of apologetic arguments in the text, but view them as part of an ironic conception of the work. This simply suggests that Evans has failed to make the ironic movement that undermines his initial reading of the apologetic remarks. I took these claims to indicate that another account of the text that attempts to understand it in a manner consistent with Climacus' remarks might be necessary.

In Chapter III, I showed that Evans and Mulhall have accounts of the first three chapters of the text that sound surprisingly similar. I outlined how Mulhall's account diverges drastically from Evans's when Mulhall recognizes the contradiction that arises from the way Climacus discusses the difference between the knowable and unknowable. I argued that if Mulhall's reading is correct, then the non-Socratic alternative offered by

Climacus is simply a parody of the Christian position that never truly transcends the Socratic. Additionally, the manner in which Climacus criticizes the limits of reason in ultimately becomes self-undermining. I also suggested that it is by means of this collapse that Kierkegaard, through Climacus, can demonstrate the inappropriateness of attempting to address religious questions by means of the understanding. In this chapter I was able to offer a richer account of *Philosophical Fragments* and explain more clearly the incompleteness of Evans's view of the text.

In Chapter IV, I demonstrated that there are good reasons for being optimistic that *Philosophical Fragments* presents a potential means of escaping the hyper-reflection of the present age. I argued that we can safely take *A Literary Review* seriously, and I outlined the problems Conway finds in the text. I clarified why I think *Philosophical Fragments* represents a particularly promising candidate for a solution to Conway's concerns. It became clear that if we take the totality of the age and the annulment of the law of non-contradiction seriously, then the use of *Philosophical Fragments* as a means of escaping the age appears especially problematic. Alternatively, I suggested that if the influence of the age is not necessarily insurmountable, then it appears reasonable to suppose that *Philosophical Fragments* still might offer a means of escaping the hyper-reflection of the present age.

It was the purpose of this thesis to examine the potential for a particular reading of *Philosophical Fragments* to elucidate confusing claims made in *A Literary Review*. If I have been successful in my task, then I have demonstrated three central claims: First, I have shown that Evans accurately claims that there are apologetic arguments in

Philosophical Fragments, but his analysis of the text remains incomplete. Second, I have shown that Mulhall offers a more complete account of *Philosophical Fragments*. Third, I have show that we can apply Mulhall's reading of the text to achieve better picture of the way someone might achieve a genuine religious life in the present age.

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VITA

Name: Erik Sven Berquist

Address: Department of Philosophy, Texas A&M University, 4237 TAMU,
College Station, TX 77843-4237

Email Address: e-berquist@philosophy.tamu.edu

Education: B.A., Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2003
M.A., Texas A&M University, 2008

Teaching Experience:

Teaching Assistant, Texas A&M University: Introduction to Logic
2006-2008

Areas of Teaching Competence:

Introduction to Philosophy
Introduction to Logic

Awards:

Teaching Assistantship: Texas A&M University
2006-2008

Undergraduate Research Grant Recipient: Minnesota State University, Mankato
2005